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Interview with Carlisle Albright Ochs

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Carlisle Albright Ochs 1901-1993

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CHAPTER II
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Charlotte: This is Charlotte Lindsay on July 7, 1987. My oral history interview of a one-room Kansas schoolhouse teacher is with my mother, Carlisle Albright Ochs of Russell, Kansas. This interview is taking place at her home. Today we are going to back in time to the early 1920's when you began your teaching career as a one-room schoolhouse teacher in Ellsworth County, Kansas. Before you started to teach, what kind of teacher education did you have?

Carlisle: After my sophomore year in high school I decided during the summer to take normal training in the high school so that I might teach. That fall I enrolled in normal training.

Charlotte: What classes did you take?

Carlisle: My junior year I took Psychology, Physiology, Agriculture, Civics and Literature and Classics. At the end of that year, we took normal examinations in Normal Training and I passed.

Charlotte: What did you take the next year?

Carlisle: The second year, my Senior year, I took Methods, Management, Grammar, Arithmetic, Reading, Geography and American History.

Charlotte: Who taught the classes that you had in normal training?

Carlisle: Many of them were taught by our Superintendent, Mr.

O.J. Silverwood. He was a fine instructor and was well liked and stayed in Ellsworth, Kansas, until he retired. He was a strict disciplinarian. A fine speaker; he was a stickler for correct English, not only speaking it, but using very good diction, too. He taught grammar very, very well, and he made it come alive and made all of us wish that we could teach youngsters to speak as he spoke.

Charlotte: How many people took normal training in your high school?

Carlisle: Out of a class of thirty-two, ten of us took normal training.

Charlotte: Were they all girls or were there some boys, too?

Carlisle: There were three boys and seven girls.

Charlotte: After you graduated from high school, what was the next step in becoming a teacher?

Carlisle: We took the normal training examinations and passed.

Charlotte: Could you tell us about the normal training exams?

Carlisle: There was a required average of 80%.

Charlotte: How many tests?

Carlisle: There were ten tests, one for each of the subject areas covered in normal training. A score of 60% or less on an individual test was failure.

Charlotte: The average of all the tests had to be 80%, then?

Carlisle: Yes.

Charlotte: Then what did you do?

Carlisle: The next thing was the County Teachers Institute that we went to in the fall. At the County Institute there were many fine speakers and other teachers who showed us how to go about starting beginners and how to teach some of the other classes. It was very worthwhile, and while I was there, I also sold subscriptions to school magazines, especially The Normal Instuctor and The Grade Teacher. Although I had other magazines that I also sold, those were the two that I really thought the teachers should read, so I pushed them.

Charlotte: Did you have any college training?

Carlisle: Yes, I attended summer sessions at Emporia Teachers College for five summers and then I took many correspondence courses and a few extension courses.

Charlotte: What kind of teaching certificate did you have?

Carlisle: After two years of teaching and attending summer school and County Teachers' Institute I received a Permanent Normal Training Certificate. I taught on this certificate all the rest of my time in teaching.

Charlotte: When you were teaching in a one-room school, what kind of supervision did you have, since there wasn't a principal in the building?

Carlisle: The County Superintendent, Mr. Coover, visited our school once or twice a year. Sometimes the school board or parents would visit and that was about the extent of visitors.

Charlotte: What kind of reports did you have to make out?

Carlisle: We had to keep attendance reports and grades of the children. They were sent, along with an end of year report, to the County Superintendent. I was very pleased to find that my reports are still to be found in the Ellsworth County Registrar of Deeds Office and in good condition. I found that mine were really well done.

Charlotte: Now that the teacher is ready to teach, let's go on and talk about the students in the one-room schoolhouse.

Carlisle: My first year was at Canyon School which was about eight miles south of Ellsworth. There I had nine to eleven students in usually about six different grades. The first year there were three Gregory children, three Heitschmidt children, four Cline children and two without siblings in school. The next year I had the same children except that the Clines were not there, but the two Basye girls enrolled and two other children without siblings.

The fourth year I went to a school called the Excelsior School which was east of Wilson. Here we had many siblings again. There were two Weinhold families; one had six children in school and the other family had five. The Kasper family had five, the Saunders three, Redmons and Klemas each had two and there were only three that did not have siblings in school, making a total of twenty-six students.

The third school I taught was Oak Creek, about five miles north of Ellsworth. Here I could drive back and forth from my home in town. Three families--Terry, Burmaster, and Chapman---each had three children. Petermans had two and there were two children without other siblings.

Charlotte: At what age did children usually begin school?

Carlisle: Mostly they were six years old, but at one time I took a child who was five because she seemed very ready for school.

Charlotte: Did children move in and out of the school district during the year?

Carlisle: Not as a rule, we had very few changes in the school year. The only time we had changes was usually children who lived on rented farms and sometimes they only lived on that farm for one year. The attendance and clientele were about the same from year to year.

Charlotte: How did the students get to school when you taught?

Carlisle: Usually they walked; most did not live more than a mile or so from the school. Sometimes a child would ride horseback and sometimes they were brought in a truck or a touring car. But for the most, we all walked.

Charlotte: I'm sure all the children carried lunches; what were in them?

Carlisle: I can tell you what I had, and the children that

lived in the house where I stayed in the country had exactly what I had. I would have meat sandwiches, and if not meat, we had a boiled egg. We had fruit, apples or oranges.

Sometimes we had something that was left over from the evening before, but as a rule it was fresh food. The other children did bring jelly sandwiches, but as a rule they also had meat sandwiches.

Charlotte: What kind of clothes did the children wear to school?

Carlisle: Well, the boys wore bib overalls as a rule, with shirts. Girls wore dresses; and many of them wore pinafore aprons to protect their dresses. They mostly dressed comparable to all the children in that neighborhood and the other schools that I had been in.

Charlotte: When the children went out for recess what kind of activities did they do?

Carlisle: Because our first school was small, when we played ring games or learned new ones, the entire school played together. Then, in order to do the things the older children liked and of course they all liked baseball, we would all play baseball. The little ones would get way-away and run after the balls if they ever got that far. Even the teacher would have to participate because there weren't too many to play baseball. I remember very well getting hit on the nose by a baseball; my broken nose resulted in my crooked nose of today!

Charlotte: Did you teach all grade levels at the schools?

Carlisle: At my first school where I taught three years I never had more than six grades at once. At Excelsior School there were all eight grades. Six in the eighth grade, two in seventh, and sixth. Three fifth graders, six fourth graders, two third graders, four second graders and one first grader completed the group. At the Oak Creek School I had six out of the eight grades.

Charlotte: Now that the teacher and the students are in the one-room school, let's next discuss the area of the curriculum and what was taught in the school. First of all, how long was the school day?

Carlisle: The students came and were all in their seats at nine o'clock. Then we had opening exercises. After the opening exercises we started our recitations. Besides a recess in the morning and afternoon, we had time off for lunch at noon and the school day was over at four o'clock.

Charlotte: How long was your school year?

Carlisle: The first two years I taught it was just seven months long. From then on, school was always eight months long.

Charlotte: What subjects did the children study?

Carlisle: In the first grade we had reading, arithmetic, spelling and writing. The second grade was practically the

same thing but with language added. The third grade had the same subjects. Geography was added in the fourth grade. In the fifth grade physiology was taught. In the sixth grade history was added. Agriculture and Civics were taught in the seventh grade and in the eighth grade they studied Classics and Kansas History.

Charlotte: How was it possible to cover so many age level subject areas in one day; and can you give us some idea of what took place in a typical school day?

Carlisle: Some classes were only five minutes long, others were ten, and the longest would be fifteen minutes.

Charlotte: How did you get through all the different areas covered; what were the other children doing the rest of the time?

Carlisle: There was always seat work. I tried to make the seatwork very valuable, not busy work, but valuable work.

Charlotte: What kind of methods did you use while you were teaching?

Carlisle: I used a great deal of rote memorization and drills. In the first grade it was the beginning of The Lewis Story Method of Teaching Reading and Spelling. The book was copyrighted in 1916 and I started using it in 1920. The basis of this method was phonics. It began by telling a story about the "King and Queen of Fairy Land," Oberon and Titania. They had five

daughters who were named A, E, I, O, and U. As the story progressed the king and queen lost their lives and the five little fairy princesses could only cry and call out their own names, "O O O," "A A A," "I I I," "U U U," and "E E E." They called until the dwarfs, hearing them, came to see if they could comfort them. The dwarfs were the consonants. I just want to tell about one consonant. Take R for instance. The r dwarf was just the shape as the small letter r. He was an ugly, gruff-looking little fellow and it sounded as if he had swallowed a very angry dog. All he could say was, "r-r-r, r-r-r." But when he tried to call the fairies, his own sound came out first - ro, ra, ri, ru and re. The pictures in the book were very fascinating to the children and I even found the older children listening intently. I didn't mind because they were learning phonics, which some had never been taught and it helped them in spelling.

Charlotte: What other ways did you have to make your teaching more effective?

Carlisle: We ran races to learn the multiplication tables, and to add and subtract. These races were done on the blackboard and they interested all of the children because you could have the younger ones do simple things and the older ones do the harder things. Then besides that, we also did a great deal of singing because I enjoyed music and had a fair singing

voice. We even learned the states and the capitals by singing. It was a wonderful way that I had learned in my fourth grade school year.

Charlotte: In any teaching situation, discipline is always an area of prime concern. What were some of the usual actions that you had to take to halt misbehavior like talking or playing pranks and this kind of thing?

Carlisle: Just a stern reprimand was sufficient and sometimes a changing of seats might correct the disturbance.

Charlotte: Did you have any real discipline problems with the children; how were they handled; did the parents get involved?

Carlisle: No, I don't think parents were ever involved. For one reason, almost all the children had siblings in school and the siblings would go home and mention the reprimand. That helped to solve the problem, because the things would always seem to right themselves.

Charlotte: Was there a problem with teacher turnover back in the 1920's and what do you think were the causes of it?

Carlisle: Yes there was. I think marriage was one of the causes. If a teacher got married, her contract immediately ceased, and they would not hire a married teacher. Another cause was dislike of teaching. Some thought they would make a good teacher; but one year sufficed to let them know they did not have a bent for the teaching profession, and many

left after one year. Then, lack of discipline; because if you couldn't keep discipline and couldn't keep the school quiet and the children attending to their own business, there was no learning. On the other hand, promotion was also a cause of turnover. I stayed at my first school for three years, but I got a very good promotion. The superintendent told me of a good school that he thought I could handle. It was a much larger school with many older children. In fact, they were worried that they would not be ready to pass the eighth grade examinations. (The four that took the exams in the school where I had been teaching had all passed.) It was a long way from my home and I wasn't very happy going that far. But I made a go of it for one year, I was very happy to get another promotion at the end of that year so that, even though I was asked back, I did not return.

Charlotte: The one-room schoolhouse was a very different facility from schools today, could you describe your schools and tell us about them?

Carlisle: The first school where I taught three years was called Canyon because it was on Canyon Road. It was just a small white frame building trimmed in green. On the inside it had a coal burning stove and windows on two sides which let enough light in for the children to do most of their studying. However, there were coal oil lamps on either side

which could be used on dreary days if the weather did not produce enough light. On the grounds were the two outhouses and a pump--that's where we got our water brought in in a bucket for the day's use--and a teeter totter, I think was the only playground equipment we had. The chores were done by the sons of the treasurer of the school board. They brought in the coal and started a fire each day. The only janitor work that I did was to sweep the floor each day. There was a recitation bench in the front of the room and I had a teacher's desk. The pupils' desks were on wooden runners so that they could be moved out of the way. There was a sectional bookcase in which there was about thirty or forty books and a place for firewood near the door entrance. There was a little building on the school grounds where the coal and firewood were kept. There were a few maps. We had an organ and a blackboard. They were of some sort of composition, they weren't slate; but they were adequate since we used them to a great degree.

Now the next school was the Excelsior School. I think the area must have been called Excelsior because there was also a church nearby that was called Excelsior Church. It was a much larger building than the Canyon School. It was painted white and on the inside the first thing that greeted you was this pot belly stove in the middle. The windows were

on two sides for light. Outhouses, swings and a water pump were on the playground. The school board arranged to take care of the chores except for the sweeping which I did daily. The interior was much the same as Canyon, but the library had about one hundred fifty volumes and here too, we had an organ.

The third school was Oak Creek. It was modern in every way and was a new building. It had running water in the building, and they had modern toilets in the basement. Could you read this article?

Charlotte: This clipping is from The Ellsworth Messenger and is titled "District No. 14 Standardized:"

School District No. 14, of which Miss Carlisle Albright is teacher, celebrated the standardization of the school Tuesday by having a big noon dinner and a program at the school house. Other schools in the neighborhood were invited to join, and districts No. 34 and No. 45 dismissed for the day and joined in the festivities. Dinner was served in the basement of this up-to-date building, and was an appetizing meal, nicely served. A program of readings, songs and playlets was given by pupils, and showed careful training on the part of Miss Carlisle. Supt. Coover nailed the steel plate bearing the words, "Standard School," to the building, and also made an interesting talk to pupils and patrons.

Carlisle: That was a very great day for Oak Creek because it was the first standardized school in the county.

Charlotte: Another matter of concern in the one-room school was the salary of the teacher. What kind of salary did you receive?

Carlisle: The first year at Canyon, I received \$80 a month. The second year I received \$90 a month and the third year I also received \$90 a month, but it was made an eight month school instead of seven month as the two preceeding years had been. At the Excelsior School I received \$105 a month and it was also an eight month school. At the Oak Creek School I received \$100, but it was just five miles from Ellsworth so I stayed at home and drove back and forth.

Charlotte: How did you receive your pay check?

Carlisle: Well, Mr. Gregory--Charlie Gregory--was the treasurer of the school Board and I stayed at his house. He was a very straight-standing Englishman who had come from England to America to reap his fortune and he really had, because he was a rancher and a farmer and he drove a Pierce Arrow Car. He gave me my check at the house. C. J. Heitschmidt was the director of the school board and I remember him well because he later married a classmate of mine. W. O. Heitschmidt was the clerk of the board and he had three children in school so I knew him quite well.

Charlotte: Do you remember any of the other school board

members in your other schools?

Carlisle: I don't remember so much about the Excelsior School, I just know that F. S. Weinhold paid me my check which was \$105 a month and at Clear Creek two members of the board were J. R. Shultz, the director, and Mr. Tanton was the treasurer and he would bring my check to the schoolhouse.

Charlotte: How did you get the money for the special items that the school needed?

Carlisle: Often times we had box suppers. They were very popular and when I was in high school a quartet I sang with were often invited to put on programs and little skits at box suppers for other one-room schoolhouses. With this experience I was rather adept at putting one on. We had one each year at the Canyon School and each time the money that was made at the box supper was spent on things for the school like an encyclopedia the first year and reading books the next. The third year I can't remember what the money was spent for but I'm sure it was something that was needed and worthwhile. Here's an article about the box supper at Canyon.

Charlotte: This is another article clipped from The Ellsworth Messenger:

The box supper and entertainment at the Canyon school house last Wednesday evening proved a success in every

particular. Much credit is due the teacher, Miss Carlisle Albright, for arranging such a splendid program which consisted of musical number by Miss Ella Hutton, Claflin, Kansas, Misses Silver, Albright, O'Donnell, Veatch, and Silverwood, of Ellsworth. The three-act play given by the children of the school was thoroughly enjoyed by all. The proceeds of the evening will be used for the purchase of an encyclopedia and bookcase for the school.

Carlisle: Then at Oak Creek we had a very nice evening and here is the newspaper article about it.

Charlotte: This article is from a Fifty Years Ago Column and is headed December 6, 1924:

Last Friday evening the Oak Creek Schoolhouse, District 14, Miss Carlisle Albright, teacher, was packed with a crowd of 300 people for the entertainment and box supper. Each pupil did himself credit. After the school program the young people of the neighborhood gave the play "Miss Mollie" which everyone present said was the best schoolhouse play he had ever seen. Due credit is given to Miss Albright, Dorothy Terry, Nora Peterman, Frances Crane, Bula Slaight, Will Terry, Gerald Slaight, and Jack Terry. After the play the ladies' quartette sang several selections. Then came the selling of baskets. In the voting contest, Miss

Albright received the box of chocolates as the most popular lady and Elmer Huseman the jar of nuts. The net proceeds were \$58.71. This school building is modern in every way, with basement furnace, running water, cloak rooms, indoor toilets, stage, piano, and everything to make a good school.

Carlisle: At Excelsior, I don't believe we even had a box supper that year because I had so many eighth graders that I was preparing for their county examinations. I think we just plainly did not have time for any outside festivities.

Charlotte: It sounds as if the one-room schoolhouse was quite a focal point in the community. Was the schoolhouse used for anything else?

Carlisle: Canyon was used as voting place and I suppose if there had been any special meetings they would have met there. Excelsior was used, as was Oak Creek on election day. The last day of school, we would have picnics. Often times the entire family would participate in this occasion and they would bring covered baskets of good food. At this time we gave the awards for perfect attendance and promoted the different children to the next grade.

Charlotte: Now this was different from the eighth grade graduation?

Carlisle: Oh, yes, the eighth grade graduation exercises were held at the Presbyterian Church in Ellsworth. They would

have a special speaker from out-of-town and the County Superintendent would give diplomas to all the eighth grade graduates. If they went on to school, they would go to high school in the nearest town. Some would do farm work.

Charlotte: Did you go on any field trips when you were teaching in a one-room school?

Carlisle: Well, at one time, when I first went to the Charlie Gregory home to live I would read late at night like I did at my home in Ellsworth. There I would often leave the bed lamp on and my father would come in and turn it off. When he learned that they used coal oil lamps he was very concerned and said, "Don't use the lamp at night. If you will use a flashlight to read by, I will buy the batteries for it." Mr. Gregory heard this story and found out I was reading in bed with a flashlight, so at Christmas time they had electricity put in. I don't think it was a hardship on them, but it was a great thing because other families didn't have electricity out in the country either. Of course with the electricity came a radio. So we took one field trip to go to the Gregory home and listen to the radio.

Charlotte: While you were teaching at the one-room schools, where did you live?

Carlisle: I lived at the Gregory's home the first three years.

It was a delightful place to stay because there were older children in the family and they drove a nice car. They often drove to Ellsworth in the evening during the week. They would always take me home on Friday evenings.

At Excelsior School I stayed with a family named Hanzlicek. They were definitely Bohemian people and often did strange things, to my way of thinking. One morning they served for breakfast what I thought was chocolate pudding, and I thought that was strange but would be fine. I took one taste and it turned out to be blood pudding. (laughing) I think I left the table.

At Oak Creek I drove back and forth; but if it was a bad night and I felt I couldn't get back the next morning, I stayed at the Tantons. They lived about a half mile from the school--maybe less than that--and they had always invited me to stay there whenever I couldn't go home.

Charlotte: What was your status in the Community?

Carlisle: I think I was always a little bit happy (laughing) to get home once in a while where I didn't have to be a model.

Charlotte: What were your relations with the children?

Carlisle: I think the girls dearly loved me. I can't say a word about the boys. (laughing)

Charlotte: Why did you leave one-room schoolhouse teaching?

Carlisle: I had never been a farm girl and I did not especially like farm living. The county superintendent told me they needed a school teacher for seventh and eighth grade in Lorraine. He said since I had handled the eighth graders at Excelsior very well, I should apply for the job. I made \$115 a month in Lorraine and they were very satisfied with my teaching. Then I found out that I could get a job teaching first grade, my first love in teaching, at Solomon. So I told the Lorraine School Board that I wouldn't return. One board member said, "Well, you make a fine seventh and eighth grade teacher but at first grade I'm afraid you'll be a flop." So it just goes to show that you can be stern if the need is there; but you can be the type of teacher that a first grader needs because from then on I only taught first grade and kindergarten.